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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [GG](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: RUSSIAN MFA ON TALKS WITH GEORGIA

REF: MOSCOW 12257

Classified By: PolMinCouns Alice Wells. Reason 1.4 (b, d)

Summary

¶1. (C) The Russian MFA was disappointed that Georgian FM Bezhuashvili brought no deliverables with him to his November 1-2 talks in Moscow. The Russians are hearing rumors of a major cabinet reshuffle in Tbilisi. Proposed talks between President Saakashvili and South Ossetian leader Kokoity are stymied by disagreement on venue. The Russian negotiator suspects Saakashvili proposed these talks as part of a plan to create a "South Ossetian Government in Exile" -- which would provoke a Russian response. End Summary.

"Disappointment"

¶2. (C) Russian MFA negotiator for South Ossetia Amb. Yuriy Popov told us November 7 that the MFA was "disappointed" by talks with Georgian FM Bezhuashvili (reftel). The Russians had expected some "steps" from the Georgians that might provide the basis for relaxing sanctions Russia has imposed on Georgia. Before the visit, the Georgian MFA had asked the Russian Charge in Tbilisi what steps might be effective with the Russians. The Charge had replied that it was up to the Georgians to come up with steps. In the event, Bezhuashvili had no deliverables, and, Popov said, the MFA believed there was no common ground. We briefed Popov on our understanding of the talks, including Bezhuashvili's assurance that Georgia planned no military actions in South Ossetia or Abkhazia, and his request for assurances that Russia would not recognize either of the separatist entities.

¶3. (C) Popov said he had met with Georgian Minister for Conflict Resolution Antadze after the latter's one-on-one meeting with DFM Denisov November 2. He said Antadze, who had said nothing during Bezhuashvili's meeting with Lavrov, seemed "insecure" about his position, amid rumors of a cabinet reshuffle. (Later, Popov mentioned that media reports hint that DefMin Okruashvili might be out in a reshuffle. Popov hoped this was the case, but doubted Okruashvili could be jettisoned without a fight. Popov noted that we are rapidly approaching the New Year, which Okruashvili promised to greet in Tskhinvali.)

South Ossetia/Abkhaz Talks: All a Trick?

¶4. (C) Popov discussed with Antadze the possibility of a Saakashvili-Kokoity meeting. Initially, Saakashvili had proposed a meeting at the Georgian ski resort of Bakuriani. Kokoity refused on grounds that about 1000 Ossetians had been expelled from that region during the 1992 war. Kokoity proposed Sochi (with Putin presiding); the Georgians rejected a Russian venue. The OSCE proposed a western European

meeting -- Brussels or Vienna -- and Popov said de Gucht's special representative Chevalier told him that both the Georgians and Ossetians rejected this. Popov said there were now thoughts of a tripartite meeting among Saakashvili, Kokoity and Bagapsh -- but there was no progress on finding a venue acceptable to all.

15. (C) Popov said he suspected a plot by Saakashvili in proposing to meet with Kokoity. November 12 would see not one referendum/election but two: one held by the Tskhinvali authorities, the other an "alternative," pro-Georgian referendum and election. Saakashvili could use an unproductive meeting with Kokoity (or a failure to hold a meeting) as an excuse for recognizing the "alternative" government. Popov believed this would lead to confrontations in South Ossetia. He warned that this would give impulse to "hotheads" in Russia to push for recognition of the Tskhinvali authorities.

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Comment

16. (C) Finding the venue for a Saakashvili-Kokoity (or Saakashvili-Kokoity-Bagapsh) meeting is dependent only on the political will to hold such a meeting. Popov seemed to be interested in our suggestion of Baku or Yerevan, but his body language implied both that his superiors insist on a Putin-led meeting in Russia -- and that Popov recognizes this as a non-starter.

17. (C) Creating a new "Ossetian Government in Exile" would, as Popov implied, set the Russians off -- much as the Georgian deployment of the "Abkhazian Government in Exile" to Kodori did. Such a move would further set back hopes for

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normalization between Georgia and Russia.
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